

Florin Japanese American Citizens League  
Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

**EADA SILVERTHORNE**

March 25, 1993  
Sacramento, California

By Etsu Yui

Florin Japanese American Citizens League  
and Oral History Program  
California State University, Sacramento  
Sacramento, California





# JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

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## PREFACE

In the summer of 1987, a small group of people from the Florin JACL met at Mary and Al Tsukamoto's home to plan a new project for the organization. Because of the unique history of Florin, we felt that there were special stories that needed to be preserved. The town of Florin, California was once a thriving farming community with a large Japanese American population. The World War II internment of persons of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast, devastated the town and it never recovered. Today there is no town of Florin; it has been merged into the larger county of Sacramento. Many Japanese Americans who reside throughout the United States, however, have their origins from Florin, or have relatives and friends who once had ties to this community. The town may no longer exist, but the spirit of the community continues to survive in people's hearts and memories.

Several hours have been devoted to interviewing former Florin residents. The focus of the interviews was on the forced internment and life in the relocation camps, but our questions touched on other issues. We asked about their immigration to the United States from Japan, pre-war experiences, resettlement after the war and personal philosophies. We also wanted to record the stories of the people left behind. They were friends and neighbors who watched in anguish as the trains transported the community away.

We have conducted these interviews with feelings of urgency. If we are to come away with lessons from this historic tragedy, we must listen to and become acquainted with the people who were there. Many of these historians are in their 70's, 80's and 90's. We are grateful that they were willing to share their experiences and to answer our questions with openness and thoughtfulness.

We owe special thanks to James F. Carlson, former Assistant Dean of American River College and to Jackie Reinier, former Director of the Oral History Program at California State University in Sacramento. Without their enthusiasm, encouragement and expertise, we never could have produced this collection of oral histories. We also wish to acknowledge the project members, volunteers, the Florin JACL which contributed financial support, Sumitomo Bank for their corporate donation, and the Taisho Young Mens Association which contributed some of their assets as they dissolved their corporation on December 31, 1991.



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## **INTERVIEW HISTORY**

### **INTERVIEWER**

Etsu Yui, retired registered nurse, is a member of the Florin Japanese American Citizens League.

### **INTERVIEW TIME AND PLACE**

March 25, 1993  
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Sacramento, California 95864

### **TYPING AND EDITING**

Stephen Egawa, studying at California State University, San Francisco, is a member of the Florin Japanese American Citizens League who lives in Piedmont, California.  
Joanne Iritani, retired teacher, member of Florin Japanese American Citizens League, prepared the manuscript for publication.

### **PHOTOGRAPHER**

Dan Inouye, a Florin Japanese American Citizens League member, reproduced the pictures.

### **TAPES AND INTERVIEW RECORDS**

Copies of the bound transcript and the tapes will be kept by the Florin Japanese American Citizens League and in the University Archives at the Library, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, California, 95819.



### BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Eada Smith Silverthorne was born March 17, 1905 in Juarez Chihuahua, Old Mexico. Her grandparents were called by the Mormon Church to go there to colonize.

When Eada was one year old, the family resettled in Mesa, Arizona, where her father's family lived. Her brother Harry Allan Smith and sister Erleen Jenny Smith were born there. Later they relocated to Phoenix, Arizona and then to Utah.

Eada Smith graduated from Brigham Young University in 1927, majoring in dramatic art and physical education. She married Kent Silverthorne in 1932. They had two boys, Conway Allan and George Wesley Silverthorne while they lived in Phoenix, Arizona.

Kent Silverthorne, a lawyer, had been working in his father's law firm when he applied and was accepted to work for the War Relocation Authority. He left his young family in Arizona and was working for the WRA for almost a year before the family joined him in the Tule Lake



Relocation Center, California. He was in charge of the "yes, yes, no, no" (loyalty) hearings. When the hearings were over in six months, he was reassigned to San Francisco, California.

Mrs. Silverthorne started as a two week substitute teacher in the Tule Lake Relocation Center and by fall was a full time teacher. When her husband left for San Francisco, she was busy with her school program and raising her own children so she remained in camp. After they left camp, the Silverthornes eventually moved to Sacramento, California. Mr. Silverthorne was involved with water law and Mrs. Silverthorne continued to teach for seventeen years.

Many of the hand crafted gifts that Mrs. Silverthorne received from the internees have been donated to the California State University, Sacramento Archives.



[Session 1, March 25, 1993]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

YUI: Let's start with your full name.

SILVERTHORNE: My full name is Eada Silverthorne.

YUI: Your husband's name was?

SILVERTHORNE: Kent Silverthorne.

YUI: Where were you born and the date?

SILVERTHORNE: I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. That's Old Mexico. My people were Mormons in a Mormon Colony down in Old Mexico. I was born in 1905.

YUI: When did you leave that area?

SILVERTHORNE: I left there when I was just a year old. I don't remember that experience at all. My mother had lived down there. She had been called by the Mormon Church. Her family had been called by the Mormon Church to go down and colonize, and they had colonized all down in Utah through Colorado, Arizona, and down into Mexico. She was born in Colorado on the way down. Her mother died when she was about six years old. Her mother's mother lived



SILVERTHORNE: down there in Colonial Juarez and said that she would take care of this little family who had just lost its mother. So my grandfather took the six children and went down there, and they lived there for about fifteen years until they were driven out by the war. They were driven out by Pancho Villa's activities and the little community was destroyed and Grandfather's land was confiscated. So they then came back up into Utah and settled there. That's how I happened to be born down there. My father came from Mesa, Arizona and had gone down there to go to the Academy, the Mormon Academy, but he didn't go to school very long. He and my mother were married down there.

YUI: So then after you left that area where did you go to?

SILVERTHORNE: They went back. My parents went back to Mesa, Arizona, my father's hometown where his mother was living. They lived there, in and around. . . My father was not an educated, trained worker of any kind so he just got jobs as he could, and he took jobs in whatever community that came up, so all



SILVERTHORNE: around. Finally, after three or four years, my brother was born in Mesa.

YUI: What was your brother's name?

SILVERTHORNE: My brother's name was Harry Allan Smith. My mother's married name was Smith and my father's name was Ray Hudson Smith. No relation to the founder of the Mormon Church, incidentally. In that period of time and with that religious background it sounds as if there might be a relationship, but there was none.

YUI: So did you have any other brothers or sisters or were there just two of you?

SILVERTHORNE: Later, about four years later, I had a sister who was born, Erleen Jenny Smith. When she was about five years old, we ended up in Phoenix, Arizona. Mesa is about seventeen miles from Phoenix so we were always close to Phoenix, but that's where my father's people lived. We finally came to Phoenix and lived there. I lived there until I was graduated from high school. When I had graduated from high school, I had heard enough about the Mormon people and the Mormon Church and people said, "You should go to the Mormon



SILVERTHORNE: school", so my family moved up into Utah. My father was planning to be a salesman, and worked with the woolen mills in Ogden for two or three years. My mother opened up a big boarding house for students in Provo, Utah, and I started to school. That's how I got to that college. They didn't stay there that long. They stayed only my freshman year but I had the bug by then. I was going to graduate. I was going to get one of those caps and gowns. [Laughter]

YUI: What year was that you started and what was the name of the school that you went to?

SILVERTHORNE: Brigham Young University. I started in the fall of 1923. I graduated from there in 1927. My family did live there the first year and I lived with them. From then on I rented in homes, rented rooms in homes and lived in homes and finished the school that way.

YUI: What was your major in college?

SILVERTHORNE: My major in college was dramatic art and physical education. I had a double major. I met the requirements for the two majors. Thanks to teachers in the physical education



SILVERTHORNE: department in Phoenix Union High School, I really had a terrific incentive to go to college. They said that I should go to college. They had me helping them in classes. I was tall. As you see I'm still tall. [Laughter] I was an athlete. I made letters and sweaters in both high school and college.

YUI: What did you do?

SILVERTHORNE: All of the sports. Girls earned points in all of them and in dancing. So the P.E. teachers and dancing teachers at Phoenix High were very instrumental in getting me into college. So I went up to Provo. I didn't know anything about entering college. None of my family had been in college. My father was aghast. He had told me when I started high school, "You're going to take some typing and get a job."

YUI: Where did you meet your husband?

SILVERTHORNE: After I graduated from college I got a job teaching in Mesa, Arizona. It was while I was teaching in Mesa, Arizona that I met my husband, Kent Silverthorne. He had gone to Emory University, which is in Atlanta,



SILVERTHORNE: Georgia, to go to school because his uncle was on the faculty there and offered him a place to live and an opportunity to go. Kent's father had lost a lot of money in cotton in Arizona and so he welcomed the opportunity. My husband was home one year working in his father's law office in Mesa and I was teaching in Mesa. I was working with the Phoenix Little Theater, and it was at the Phoenix Little Theater that I happened to meet my husband. My future brother-in-law knew my brother very well and knew Kent and introduced us. We happened to get together that way.

YUI: As a family where did you live?

SILVERTHORNE: It was a couple of years before we got married after I met him. I went to Chicago and worked in different temporary jobs. I was working at the University of Chicago in the purchasing department when the budget cutback released the newest people and I was without a job. And my husband, by that time, was back in school in Atlanta at law school. Instead of going home I decided I would go around by Atlanta and say hello to him and go



SILVERTHORNE: on home, which I did. I worked in Atlanta that year in a book publishing company, a little religious publishing place not far from the University where he was going. By that spring we had decided to get married. Uncle Hugh, the uncle in Atlanta, offered us a honeymoon cottage. They called it the honeymoon cottage because so many young people had gotten married and finished school living on Uncle Hugh's property in this little over a hundred year old cottage. So, we got married there. After Kent finished law school we. . . .

YUI: What year did he finish?

SILVERTHORNE: Well, we were married in 1932 so that would have been about 1933 because we stayed there a year after we were married. His people came for his graduation from law school and we drove home by way of Illinois and Colorado. When we got back to Phoenix my husband went to work with his father. We lived in Phoenix from then until the war relocation event caught us.

YUI: You had a family there in Phoenix?



SILVERTHORNE: My two boys were born there. The oldest one was Conway Allan Silverthorne. The second one, three years later, was George Wesley Silverthorne.

YUI: Then World War II came along. What happened to what your husband had been doing?

SILVERTHORNE: My husband was working for his father. He had been working for about ten years for his father after we got there. We had been married in 1932 and got home in 1933 where the war caught us in 1942. He wanted to make some kind of war effort. We had friends who had been head of the Navajo Reservation for some years. When Kent was up in San Francisco on a business trip for his father's law firm and his, by that time he was a partner, he met Sy, a good friend, in San Francisco and he said I'd like to be in the war effort. Kent was turned down because of his weak eyes. Sy said, "We always need good lawyers in this agency", which was the War Relocation Authority. We didn't know anything about the agency. Kent came home and he said, "I'm going to apply." Sy, by this time had been appointed head of the WRA



in the seven western states, the evacuation of the Japanese in the seven western states. That's why he could offer a job to my husband.

YUI: What was his full name?

SILVERTHORNE: E.R. Fryer would be the way he signed his name. E. Riegman Fryer. He was head of the seven western states of the War Relocation Authority at that time. He was one of the top ones. So it was through him that we got connected with the WRA idea even. We had no idea what it was. When Kent came home he said, "I'm going to go to work for Sy if I can get a job, because I'm going to apply." He just hated corporation law. He was always working for a big corporation against the little guy. And this was especially true with the Gillespi Dam Water background in Arizona. Phoenix got water from the Roosevelt Dam, which was the first federal irrigation project in the United States in 1905. So water meant an awful lot to us. We had real respect for water. He thought that would be real fun. With this client, the Gillespi Dam people, the big oil people from



SILVERTHORNE: Nebraska and they had gotten hold of the Gillespi Dam, which was down below Buckeye about fifty miles south of Phoenix. So we just saw this big, big moneyed outfit Gillespi gouging all the little farmers all around Buckeye there, just pushing them off the land and taking away their water. That corporation law just drove him crazy and he couldn't stand it. He was glad to get away from the law firm even though we lost an awful lot after ten years of work. When he came home it wasn't too long after that Sy was back in the area, in Phoenix area, and took us over to the War Relocation Camp at Rivers. It was probably on the Gila River. So we went over there and visited that camp that day. So that was the first I had ever heard of this war relocation thing. I may have been out to a strawberry patch to buy a crate of strawberries some time but I didn't know a Japanese from the man in the moon. I didn't know anything about the ethnic groups. We never thought of those things in those days. They were totally out of our minds. I don't even remember if I was appalled by it.



SILVERTHORNE: I was just amazed by what Sy was head of and what he was doing. He was telling and making decisions on how to feed the camp and how to keep it going and how to make things work. He was that kind of person. He had all that experience with the Navajos and so that's why he was given the job. He went out later to become head of the immigration program in Europe after World War II. He was good, really good at that kind of work. Knew the right people. My husband wrote the letter of application to Washington and was accepted. I was just staggered. Meant disrupting my life working in the Phoenix Little Theater and doing plays for them and raising my little children. I was just having a good time in life. Here this was going to change all this. I was going to have to leave, well I didn't leave for a year. I stayed in Phoenix. Kent left almost immediately, almost within two or three weeks, went to San Francisco and then went back to Washington and was inducted. You know how they give them courses in what to do and how to do things when they take them into a job like



SILVERTHORNE: that. He was in San Francisco and I was still in Phoenix. He stayed in San Francisco for months and I stayed in Phoenix working. I had these commitments, The Little Theater, and put on plays and take them out to the Posts where the soldiers were and entertain them and ran it for ten days, ten nights in Phoenix. I was busy with that sort of thing and I thought it was important. The next year came around. After the kids finished school that year, Kent had been gone almost a year. I decided this wasn't the way to do things. By that time he had been assigned to Tule Lake to handle the hearings. When he got to Tule Lake he was in charge of those "yes-yes, no-no" hearings you remember. He was in Tule Lake so I rented the house. We had built a new home just not long before he left. I rented that house furnished, and packed my bags and put my kids in my car. The three of us, little kids and myself, started up over the desert. I had never seen the Grand Canyon. I was going to get to see the Grand Canyon before I left this time. So we drove up through there and drove on up



SILVERTHORNE: through the central part of Utah into Logan, where my mother was living. On the way up we had a flat tire and at that time you couldn't get new tires without a special permit so we drove for miles and miles with a flat tire. There was no store. Oh what a trip! We had a real experience getting to Tule Lake. Kent met us in Reno. So we all went up together from Reno up into Tule Lake and when I got up there that was my introduction to Tule Lake. He had been there seven months by that time. So we got up there, I guess it was in July. It was the start of summer school. It may have started, but they needed teachers desperately. They knew that I had taught and that I had worked with these plays, that I was interested in drama. The man who was teaching drama at the high school at Tule Lake needed to go back to Berkeley to get his M.A. He wanted to join the festivities and the graduation exercise and what not. So he was leaving two weeks early and asked would I substitute for him for two weeks. So I did. If you want to have an experience ever, stand up in front of a class and see thirty-five



SILVERTHORNE: faces or so that all look alike. And what they looked like to me on that day, remember that poster where it showed the Japanese with the dark glasses and the finger pointing out. Oh, it was so common. What did it say on it? I looked out at that class. I had never been with Japanese people before. It just looked like one of those faces after another. They all looked exactly alike to me. I'm not kidding. I was terrified. I was absolutely terrified. I thought I couldn't do the job. But all the people supported me and said you can, you can. Just take it step by step. I got through those two weeks. I can't remember much about it except I can see some of the individuals. They did begin to look different. [Laughter] It doesn't take long, believe me. I can still see one Nisei boy. He was so different from the others. He still just stands out. I can't remember their names. I have just lost the names of most of them. Then summer school came. They didn't have summer school in the high school, but they had it in the grade schools and my kids went to the Japanese grade school summer



SILVERTHORNE: school and had a wonderful experience. Then fall came and in the meantime my husband was working in his office. By that time, they had gotten me this permanent/temporary credential so I could teach in the fall. They gave me a full load. I had five classes. I've forgotten what they all were. One was some kind of poetry. Must have been an English class of some kind but it had a lot of poetry; Problems in Democracy; Speech, how to pronounce words; and I really don't remember what else I taught but I had five classes, maybe two of each of these except for the Problems in Democracy. My kids couldn't go to the Japanese school. They had to go up to Tule Lake, which was about seven miles from the camp, and go to the California schools up there. They'd get in a jeep, or truck or something each morning and would be taken up there. All the kids on the project were handled that way. It was a disaster. The Japanese school was excellent. The people there were good and they were dedicated. They really were trying. But that school at Tule Lake. . . three or four



SILVERTHORNE: teachers for the whole school. My son went to a teacher who was just starting to teach. My second son, my first son was in third grade, went to a teacher who was new. She'd graduated from Chicago, back around Chicago someplace. I have forgotten what school.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

YUI: You were saying about your school teaching experience at Tule Lake?

SILVERTHORNE: I was telling you the condition at that little school in Tule Lake. The new teacher, who had never had any experience before, was trying to teach first, second, third grades, the school band, and the school newspaper. My son learned nothing. [Laughter] Bless her heart, she was asked to do the impossible. They were away at that school and I was at the high school trying to teach. We had a big high school, about 1,800, which is a big high school. There were at about this time about 18,000 in the camp. It was a big, full camp at that time. I was struggling, reading like crazy to get acquainted with the materials that I was being asked to teach and



SILVERTHORNE: I had never taught before. Working with the kids, getting acquainted with these kids. They were wonderful. I tell you, it's impossible to say how delightful those young people were. Well, I do get along with young people. I always have and I still do. But it's more than that. I've had enough experience to know that it was more than just being able to get young people to respond. They were just exceptional. I don't know whether they were rising to the occasion which challenged them. I don't know how to judge that. But they did. For instance, this is an example. All year long we didn't have a theft reported in that school. And there were no lockers, there were just places that you could dump your books and things. And at one point I remember it was something like \$26.23, some figure like that in the twenties, turned in. Found and turned in. Now that's an indication of the character of the young people we were working with. That wouldn't happen today in schools. Just nice kids wouldn't even do that. They'd just say "Oh look what I found" and go off with it.



SILVERTHORNE: It's a totally different atmosphere, a totally different attitude. Those young people were just great and studied. They just studied, studied, and studied. You couldn't tell them to do anything that they didn't do. They were really anxious. Over and over again you'll find through here how anxious they were to please and prove themselves. And believe me it showed. Not that they were groveling or anything like that, I didn't have that sense once. But they were just delightful young people who were going to prove themselves and they did in my opinion. They proved themselves over and over again. It was just a lovely experience. It was a strange experience to teach them Problems in Democracy. Most of them were boys in that class. I don't quite know why. Well, most of the kids in the school were boys. But in this particular class most of them were boys. Do you remember the incident at Tule Lake when the shooting occurred at the gate? The workers were coming back from the fields and they always lined up to check in to get into the



SILVERTHORNE: project. They were always under guard. One of the guards got nervous, I guess. One of the men, working his way into the door was maybe talking loud or something, made him nervous and he shot the fellow. It was a horrible thing. The brother of that man who was shot was in this Problems in Democracy class. Well, how do you talk to a class the next day after something like that happens at the gate the night before. We talked and everybody said what they thought. They were so mature in their attitude. They didn't get mad. They didn't show anger. Some of them were impatient, you could see that. I don't think that I could have been in the class. It was a tremendous experience to watch these young people. And the brother was there, and he didn't think that it was just, he didn't think it was fair, but he also did not lash out and accuse nor go on a diatribe of anger, which I felt he was justified to do. But he didn't. He didn't say too much. But all the other boys were expressing their feelings. They were very orderly. They didn't go berserk at all. It wasn't like a protest or



SILVERTHORNE: a riot, or anything like that. It was just orderly, talking to me. That was one of the fantastic experiences in my life. I will never forget it. Emotionally I was staggered. While at Tule Lake we had to be checked in and out. We hated it. We were under the conditions that the Japanese people were so we could sympathize with it.

YUI: Where were the hearings held?

SILVERTHORNE: The hearings were held in the administration building in the Center. I never did get to attend any of the hearings because what I think, as I recall, I think my husband's office and the little offices around were just utilized. And the people sat waiting their turns and then they would go in and talk with him. I didn't get there. Later I was in those offices once the place closed down after the riots and they closed the schools for a couple of months. I was in there. I was typing and doing things like that helping with the office work. During the hearings I was never in there. But as I understood it, that's what was happening. They would come in and talk with my husband.



SILVERTHORNE: He had this form, these questions that had to be answered by each one. He would come home at night. He would be nearly ruined by that. Here were these people, decent, nice people with no axes to grind whatsoever about politics or government or anything, having to make a choice whether to leave their family here or go back and join their family in Japan. Leave some of the boys or their children, because the boys were trying to get out of the camps. Whether they wanted to go back to their homeland to see their parents before they died. And they were torn between this. And they had to say in this session whether they were loyal or disloyal to the United States under these circumstances. It was terrible. It was absolutely terrible to see those people on the rack. That way Kent just nearly died. They cried and some of them didn't speak good English so they had their interpreters, their sons and their children. It was a nightmare. It was a nightmare holding those hearings, but trying to explain to them and giving the options, everyone had to finally make a choice.



SILVERTHORNE: Outcome of that, as I recall it, we had trainloads of people leaving because they separated everybody. Over the loudspeaker was this song "Auld Lang Syne." I hate that song to this day. I hate that song. It just brings. . . sweeps these things over me. This desolation. I see this long fence, the train lined up outside, people climbing on filling the trains, and the people with their hands up against this fence looking, trying to wave to the people on it. It was terrible that all these people were separated out at the end of the hearings after they'd made their choices and they left or they stayed. Families broken up right there in front of our eyes. It was just a heartbreaking thing to have that go on. It was just terrible. Such an injustice. You remember hearing about the riots at Tule Lake?

YUI: Can you tell me a little bit about that? How you felt, what you did, and what was it all about?

SILVERTHORNE: Well, they closed the schools during the "riots." I was working in the offices, Kent's offices, helping with what little work



I could type and I could do a few things. So I was working in there helping with the work.

YUI: Where did you live all of this time?

SILVERTHORNE: Well, we had barracks just like the camp barracks that we lived in only that the camp was fenced off with a high fence and you had to go through a gate to go in there and the high school was in there. The high school was just a series of barracks. There were no real architectural buildings in this whole camp. Outside of the fence with a space between the fence and the homes were a couple of rows of barracks. We lived in one of the barracks. The only thing is that we had more space per person. The people here sometimes had three or four in a room and they were little tiny rooms. I remember my son, the oldest son I think, he thought he was going to be an architect at that time. He took the little space where the beds were, that they slept on, and made a little desk, and little cabinets. He just barely squeezed them in. We had that little space, we had a bedroom, we had a living room, and at the end of the living room. . . Funny I can't remember where



SILVERTHORNE: the bathroom was in all of this. [Laughter]  
Must have been back here by the kitchen  
because the plumbing would have been  
connected some way to the kitchen and the  
kitchen was right at the end. It was just a  
little space.

YUI: Where did you go grocery shopping?

SILVERTHORNE: We went up to Tule Lake. Each weekend we  
would leave the project and go up to Tule  
Lake. I think most of the. . . it's the only  
place we could have gone because there was  
nothing like that for sale on the project.  
We would go up to Tule Lake, which was about  
seven miles, or up to Klamath Falls, which  
was considerably farther, about forty miles  
up over the Oregon border. Klamath Falls was  
in Oregon. Klamath Falls was a pretty big  
town. A lumbering town. They had  
restaurants. I remember getting acquainted  
with salmon. First time I had ever had fresh  
salmon. We didn't have that in Phoenix in  
those day because you didn't have  
refrigeration for shipping. So I remember  
that restaurant because of the salmon and  
some kind of berry pie. [Laughter] We would



go up there to buy dishes or whatever we needed. Tule Lake was a tiny little town about seven miles away.

YUI: Did you ever visit any of the mess halls?

SILVERTHORNE: I didn't get into the mess halls when they were eating. They were described to me. Mothers would cry talking to me. They had no control over their children in these mess halls. They lost control over the children. They were heartbroken over what was happening to their children, and you could understand it because in these long mess halls where the food was just produced in such quantities and served up, you sat where you wanted to and how could you control it. Family life and control just broke down. The mothers were very aware of what was happening to them right from the beginning. They were just heartsick about it. They cried, trying to tell you what they were experiencing. I didn't have a lot of time to be with them. I didn't get to know many of the people intimately. I don't know what the other staff members did. I didn't like the administration. I thought what they did so



SILVERTHORNE: many times was inexcusably cruel and mean and they didn't have to be that way. My husband felt that way too. My husband left after six months and he went back up to San Francisco, and I was there alone. Being alone didn't bother me. I don't mean it that way. I was there about the last six months with the kids alone. I was teaching. I was busy and had my own kids that I had to take care of. I would go down to the camp for their events. They would have a tea ceremony. The people would give classes to their own children after their regular, public school classes. I took, for a few weeks, dancing. Here I was, this tall, tall person with all these short people and I felt so silly. [Laughter]

YUI: Did you have fun?

SILVERTHORNE: I loved it! Of course I loved dancing of all types. I always have. I had taught dancing before and it was part of my major. I loved it. They let me take it. The woman who taught it was somebody with a special honor from the Emperor in Japan. She was good. I tried it: the walking, the head tilting, and



SILVERTHORNE: many techniques that I had never heard of but got acquainted with. I don't know why I quit. I never did take the tea service class but I attended some of them. I'd go to some of the theater events. I became very interested in this culture up there, exposed to something so new. When I got in to San Francisco, there were so many things to see. I still, even in Sacramento, go to see things there. Every once in a while I go down to the church on Riverside and see displays and such.

YUI: Did you get acquainted with Japanese food?

SILVERTHORNE: One of the women who worked for me, the first one I had and worked the longest was Taka. I don't remember her last name. She was the first and only woman operator down in the Embarcadero. She was a powerhouse. She had her own business. That's where they operated, down there in the Embarcadero where all these people would go every morning. She just fascinated me. She was a strong woman. She worked for me and she just took us over. I would come home and if the curtain needed to be hemmed she would hem it. I didn't ask



SILVERTHORNE: her to do any of this. She just took over. Empty milk cartons weren't thrown out but were rinsed out and you watered your ferns with it. She was so great. She introduced us to Japanese food. She'd get these big prawns. Tempura meals! I would have a guest, a fellow teacher. Everyone just drooled over this wonderful food. She was a marvel of a woman, Taka. She gave me. . . she gave me this in Tule Lake. She was a very wealthy woman in San Francisco. She made such good money at that marketplace before the war. I don't remember her last name.

YUI: I see you received many gifts from many people.

SILVERTHORNE: Oh, they were so sweet. I don't remember individual students. I just wish I'd known how unique they were going to be at the beginning, but I didn't. I was busy with my own life and trying to adjust to a new community myself. When I came to Sacramento, the schools were so terrible I plunged into trying to get better schools going for my kids. After that, while I was working with



SILVERTHORNE: that, my kids got old enough to go to college and we wanted them to go to a school that was very expensive. It wasn't a public school. We wanted them to go to Reed up in Portland, which they did. Both of them graduated in their undergraduate work there. I went back to school myself and got my fifth year, my California credential. Then I went to work. I worked for seventeen years out at San Juan High School.

YUI: What subject did you cover in camp?

SILVERTHORNE: I taught English of different kinds, but I can't remember the titles of the classes but one of them involved poetry. It may have been Modern American Poetry. I can remember I'd have them find something that expressed some sentiment and they'd read for me and we'd work on enunciation and pronunciation. All of it was language. How to speak. I taught one group of Isseis. I taught one class of Kibeis, who were a little older than the American high school students. They took everything so seriously. They were a serious group of young people. I was teaching them language, just how to say the words and what



they meant. It was quite a group of them, about twenty. Then I taught Problems in Democracy.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

SILVERTHORNE: Another thing I remember, they had a big space between the fences that separated from where the people were and where the staff was. The loudspeakers would play music at night a lot, sometimes Japanese music. We'd hear the odori music. It looked like they were having such a good time, whether they were just doing it for something to do or not, I don't know, because as I look back on it now, maybe it was just "do anything." But it did look as if they were having fun doing that dance. It was a huge, huge circle. So that meant lots of people were doing it. In the daytime the boys would play baseball in there on Saturdays and Sundays when they weren't in school. There was a long strip of open land. The whole place was surrounded by fence. There was a long space with a fence around it, barracks on one side where we lived. You had to go through a gate and



SILVERTHORNE: through another gate to get over here where the camp was, barracks for the people, wash houses, toilets, mess halls, etc. That camp with all those people was always spotless and clean. You'd never seen such a clean place. It was absolutely spotless. Everybody was looking for work to do with their hands. Some of them took the fronts of those barracks, where you'd step up on a step and go in like mine that I lived in, and they'd build. They'd do this out of orange crates a lot. I remember that orange crate wood so much because they'd use it for so many things. They would build a covering over the front step with lattice work. They would do the grandest things with it. I don't know how their imagination worked. They'd decorate their little barracks, their homes with real beauty. It was just amazing how many of those things were beautiful and how clean that whole place was with all those people in it. It was phenomenal. We used to say it, everybody used to say it, and not all the staff liked the Japanese. Some of the staff were there. . . I don't know why they



SILVERTHORNE: were there. I really don't know why they were there. Some of them, especially on the police force, showed that when the riots started, they didn't like the Japanese. A lot of people were people who were afraid of the Japanese. They were really terrified of them. They just were.

It was something to see the beauty that existed in the midst of this damn dirty lake bottom. It was just a terrible place.

Pretty mountain over here, Castle Rock. And I've forgotten the name and I can only think of the popular name, and I'm not going to say it, over here on the other side. They were quite low and far away. I really never made a personal relationship with any one of the Kibeis. I think they were suspicious of me. They were older, more thoughtful. They weren't as Americanized as the young kids. They weren't used to me. I've never analyzed it this way before, but as I look back on it I realize that is what happened. They were interesting to me because of this maturity and this difference and earnestness. They didn't want to waste a second. They had



SILVERTHORNE: their goals set way beyond getting through this, you could tell that because they were working and they wanted to learn everything they could out of each moment in the class. It was an interesting experience for me. But I did not make one personal friend. Most of the classes, I had personal friends. Later, after we went back to school after the riots, as I recall, we didn't have any trouble picking up, going on to school. The kids knew what they wanted to do. Of course, I was teaching seniors mostly, which may make a difference in the total picture. I don't know. They also knew what they wanted. They wanted their graduation diplomas. So they were in earnest about getting them. They also wanted a senior ball. They wanted everything just like they'd have had at home. They put out a yearbook. I helped guide them and got materials for them. They worked their little heads off. Some of them had worked on staffs at high schools where they'd come from and they knew what they were doing. And they did it. I have in here, someplace, some sheets that amounted to the senior yearbook. We had



no trouble getting back to work that I can remember.

YUI: Can you tell me a little bit about the riots? What do you suppose caused it? Your feeling at the time?

SILVERTHORNE: I have the feeling, what caused it, was the way the administration handled the new people that came in. The new people that came were bolder than a lot of the people. Most of the Japanese were pretty docile, and pretty compliant, and worked to make things better if they could. They may not have felt that way inside but they performed that way. They were a nice, cooperative group by and large. These new people who had been separated out were not of this nature. They had fought their way through, and they were still ready to fight for what they thought was right or what they wanted. The administration did not like this. The administration had no empathy with the Japanese at all. Mr. Raymond R. Best. Do you know that name? He was the project director. When I moved to Sacramento, he lived here. I wouldn't even look him up. We did not make contact with



SILVERTHORNE: that man. We did with two or three of the people that we knew were here. Glad to meet them. We liked them. Paul Robertson for one. He was the assistant administrator that came in with that new group of people. He had been down there. He was a good man, but Best was a neanderthal, in my opinion, he really was an awful man. I think that a lot of it. . . now this is just my opinion because as I say, we weren't in on the planning or the talking because they knew we didn't approve so they didn't say much, even to my husband. And of course he was only there for that special project and then gone. He was there during the riots. He never was included in their intimate planning. Thank God! The first thing I knew that the camp was about to break apart was one night when we were all herded into the gym. We were told we should spend the night in the gym instead of our own place, that we were in danger. I didn't know why I was in danger, and I didn't feel any danger, and I had absolutely no fear. We went over there to the gym. We saw people coming in. Lots of



SILVERTHORNE: people left the project. Lots of the staff left the project and went up to Tule Lake or Klamath Falls for the night. They were scared. They were scared and some of them had cause to be scared. They had done horrible things. I had no fear. My husband had no fear. We just spent the night. It was absolutely just a night of disruption because we were in the gym sleeping on cots instead of in our house. The second night we knew that there had been "goings on". As I say, we weren't in on the know but we knew that things had happened that they didn't want to talk about. We later found out that there was this battering with baseball bats, hitting with baseball bats and that sort of thing for control. I can't inform you what really happened there. I just don't know. I was there on the property but I wasn't in the know, and we certainly weren't told by the administrative people. Dr. Opler, who was the Community Analyst there for the government. . . Each camp had an Analyst, as we did at Tule Lake. He was an anthropologist and he worked with the people.



SILVERTHORNE: A nice fellow, so sympathetic. Strange fellow, even to me. I don't know what he would be like to the Japanese because he was a New Yorker. I guess Jewish. I know his wife was very different from western Americans. So sympathetic and so understanding of people. He was a good man. Opler was his name. Don't know what became of him. The people who were afraid left and then would come back the next morning at ten or eleven o'clock. At one point, during one of those day, nearly everything closed down. The schools closed down, and I went in to help in my husband's office. I don't know what I thought I was doing. I was working with a Mrs. Cook, who seemed to know what she was doing because she worked in there all the time. So I worked under her direction. We kept the books and the records going and talked to people if they'd come in. Not many people were coming in at this point. At one point we looked out the windows and there were hundreds of people surrounding this building. The word was to watch out, take care of yourself and don't fail to keep an



SILVERTHORNE: eye open on what's going to happen because people were scared. I looked out and I didn't see anything. I saw people with their kids. At one point, my kids had gone off to school in a jeep to Tule Lake. I had wondered how they had gotten home, what was happening to them. So about three o'clock, middle of the afternoon when they maybe would be getting home, I said I was going to go home. "I'm going to take a break and go home." Well, I had my dog with me. We had a cocker that everybody on the project just loved. She was a sweet dog, a pretty dog and they loved her. Everybody loves dogs. So I took the dog, walked through the crowd, walked to my barracks, said hello to the ones I knew, smiled, people would look at the dog, we'd nod, and came back through the same crowd. No fear, nothing to be afraid of. Absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Those people had been told by some of these young people who'd come in and wanted to confront the administration to come. They'd come, complying as they do, but they didn't know. I don't think most of them knew what they



SILVERTHORNE: were there for, let alone a riot. I was shocked, when I came to Sacramento, to read what the BEE would have to say about that. The Bee was very responsible for a lot of what hate existed at that time. It was a terrible policy on the part of the Bee at that time. I didn't really think about the Bee. I had never heard of Bee, but they misrepresented everything that happened up there. They made it sensationalized. It looked as if all hell were about to break it. Well, there was no such thing. Nobody cared whether you walked through them or not. They weren't all up in arms about anything. Some of the leaders were madder than hornets, probably because of the way they were treated. Something about food for one thing, if I'm not mistaken. I didn't know really what was going on myself, but I know that the feelings of the people were not agitated enough to go get that administration. They may have felt that about Mr. Best. So much for the riot from my experience. One of the policemen lived two or three barracks down from us, had a son that played with my sons.



SILVERTHORNE: He came in and wanted my sons' baseball bat. We didn't know what for, but we later found out that they used those bats that night. We just never did like that man. He was bossy, the kind that gets power and wants to use it on people who don't have any power. We just weren't told much that was going on. I don't think my husband knew any more than I did. I would have known from him. We were outsiders. We didn't leave the camp. We didn't go anyplace. We just mixed with the people. We would probably have been called "Jap lovers". I had never heard the term before that time. I didn't know Japanese from, as I said before, the man in the moon. I had never anything to do with them. When I got acquainted with them they were wonderful people.

YUI: I think it's the way you treat people.

SILVERTHORNE: I do too. I think that's the answer to every problem between people. Even though there's real misunderstandings, it's the way you treat them the way it comes out. I hope this administration has enough sense to treat, in their dealings with the world, the people as



if they respect them. I don't think the last administration did.

YUI: So your husband was there a total of six months?

SILVERTHORNE: He was there about six months. I was there one year and one week, and then he came back to camp. He'd bought a house for us at Mill Valley. While we were waiting for the people to move out of it, we lived at Stinson Beach. After a couple of months at Stinson, we moved into this house in Mill Valley. Lived there for a year. He was still with WRA. They hadn't closed down all of work. He worked with the problems of the Japanese in retrieving values from lost properties. He had a lot to do with that work that went on at that time. He used to tell what people had lost. Some of them left holdings with people they thought they could trust and found they couldn't trust them. It was just another heartbreaking story. Those were the problems. And then finally the whole office closed down and my husband found work with water law, over here in Sacramento. And we moved over here because of the water law



interest that he'd developed when he was with his father's firm.

YUI: You've certainly had a very interesting experience.

SILVERTHORNE: Yes, I've had some interesting experiences.

YUI: You've taught here in Sacramento?

SILVERTHORNE: I taught here seventeen years and then had to retire. Then I did volunteer work with three or four different organizations. Finally, I liked the work with the English as a Second Language with these Laotian women. That was another group of people I had never encountered before--very different; very nice and gentle, sweet people; very uneducated; very unsophisticated people; farm people from Laos who had been pushed along from camp to camp across Asia to get here. It was interesting. I had to quit last fall. What I'll do, I don't know. [Laughter] If I've got some time left, I might as well have another experience of some kind. . . .

I had the information of what he (her husband) did but he was one, sympathetic man. I'm telling you he made some good friends. It was because of his knowledge of the law



SILVERTHORNE: and what it could do for them and working with them and helped them afterwards. I really think he really saved a lot of things for a lot of people. My husband was an Englishman. His family had come from England. He was very quiet. He had a heart of gold and just loved people. I know from the way he'd tell me and what he'd feel about things and how he'd break his neck to get something accomplished for somebody. I wish I had the information just in honor of him. It always feels like I'm trying to catch up with the world. So limited outlook. If I'd known more from the beginning, I could have observed or noted so much. I just didn't. So I'm always behind. It's just been a wonderful experience.

[End Tape 2, Side A]